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NEEDED RESEARCH IN TEACHER EDUCATION--SENSITIVITY TRAINING AND THE PROCESS OF CHANGE.

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TO HELP PREPARE PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS FOR ADEQUATE HANDLING OF THE PHENOMENON OF CHANGE, SOME ASPECTS OF THE APPLICABILITY OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING TO PROCESSES OF CHANGE IN EDUCATION ARE DISCUSSED. OBJECTIVES OF SUCH TRAINING ARE GIVEN AS--(1) SELF-INSIGHT, (2) BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF OTHERS AND AWARENESS OF ONE'S IMPACT ON THEM, (3) BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF GROUP PROCESSES, (4) INCREASED RECOGNITION OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LARGER SOCIAL SYSTEMS, AND (5) GREATER AWARENESS OF THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE. ONE TECHNIQUE FOR REALIZING THESE OBJECTIVES IS THE T-GROUP, A RELATIVELY UNSTRUCTURED SITUATION IN WHICH ALL MEMBERS ARE LEARNERS, AND WHERE DATA IS SIMULTANEOUSLY COLLECTED ON BEHAVIORAL TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN MEMBERS AND THE EXPERIENCE WHICH GENERATES SUCH BEHAVIOR. T-GROUP ACTIVITY FACILITATES THE PROCESS OF CHANGE BY IMPROVING INTERACTION. IN A CLASSROOM SITUATION, T-GROUP ACTIVITY FOSTERS NEW ROLE CONCEPTS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS (TEACHERS MOVE FROM DIRECTIVE TO INTEGRATIVE FUNCTION, STUDENTS MOVE FROM CONVERGENT TO DIVERGENT OPINIONS). THE PARTICULAR APPLICABILITY OF T-GROUP ACTIVITY TO SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSES DISCUSSED. PAPER PRESENTED AT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOC. OF N.Y. STATE AND THE N.Y. STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CONVOCATION (ALBANY, NOVEMBER 12-14, 1967). (AF)

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SENSITIVITY TRAINING AND THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

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SENSITIVITY TRAINING AND THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

One important aspect of teacher education that needs further study is the preparation of pre-service teachers for adequate handling of the phenomenon of change. The several aspects of teacher education that emphasize change in the curriculum, change in role perception of the teacher and of the learner, change in the notions of how instruction is truly individualized somehow have not really explored how newcomers to the profession may enter a world where these aforementioned changes may serve to threaten individuals, or even whole school systems.

In the time allotted, I would like to share with you one illustration of the processes involved in introducing change into a school setting, simply to highlight the complexity of the problem. In a suburban community on Long Island, a pilot project was initiated last year to explore the possibility of changing the noted lack of ability for the several levels of the community to communicate with one another effectively. Four adult community members, representing diverse roles (parent, ex-school board president, the leaders of the two forces pro and con in a proposed bond issue), the school superintendent, three teachers, and seven eleventh grade students engaged in a t-group experience. T-group is a process developed by the National Training Laboratories, a subsidiary of the NEA. It is defined by Benne and others as follows:

> A T-group is a relatively unstructured grdup in which individuals participate as learners. The data for learning are not

outside these individuals or remote from their immediate experience within the T-group. The data are the transactions among members, their own behavior in the group, as they struggle to create a productive and viable organization, a miniature society; and as they work to stimulate and support one another's learning within that society. Involving experiences are a necessary, but not the only, condition of learning. T-group members must establish a process of inquiry in which data about their own behaviors are collected and analyzed simultaneously with the experience which generates the behavior. Learnings thus achieved are tested and generalized for continuing use. Each individual may learn about his own motives, feelings and strategies in dealing with other persons. He learns also of the reactions he produces in others as he interacts with them. From the confrontation of intentions and effects, he locates barriers to full and autonomous functioning in his relations with others. Out of these he develops new images of potentiality in himself and seeks help from others in converting potentialities into actualities.

Each individual may learn also about groups in the processes of helping to build one. He may develop skills of membership and skills for changing and improving his social environment as well as himself. The staff who work with T-Groups do not see any necessary opposition between participation in groups and autonomous individual functioning, though they are well aware that opposition does occur in many associations of our lives and that group forces may be used to inhibit personal development. In the T-Group, on the contrary, the objective is to mobilize group forces to support the growth of members as unique individuals simultaneously with their growth as collaborators. Influences among peers are paramount in this learning process. In the T-Group, members develop their own skills in giving and receiving help. They learn to help the trainer or teacher as he assists in the development of individual and group learnings.[1]

The National Training Lab lists the following five factors as most important objectives of human relations sensitivity training:

Self-insight
Better understanding of other persons and awareness of one's impact on them.
Better understanding of group processes and increased skill in achieving group effectiveness.
Increased recognition of the characteristics of larger social systems.
Greater awareness of the dynamics of change.

A training laboratory tries to create a climate encouraging learnings, understandings, insights, skills in the areas of self, group and organization. The preliminary examination of the responses of the participants to two questionnaires indicates that a notable degree of achievement of these objectives has been reached.

1 Bradford, Leland, Jack R. Gibb, and Kenneth D.Benne, T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method. New York; John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964

An analysis of the process of T-Group reveals its relationship to the total complex of the process of change. The rationale indicates that before change can take place effectively, people affected by such change must learn how to interact with each other so that greater productivity may result as the change takes effect. From this experience, a present research project was evolved and is now in operation. How can a classroom setting be changed so that interaction between the student and teacher, and student and student may give everyone an opportunity to provide maximum performance of all involved in the educational process?

Such a change necessitates new role concepts for both teacher and student. The teacher must move from a highly directive person and leader to one who becomes a more highly integrative leader, one who readily accepts statements of choice, differences of opinion, and suggestions for new ways of proceeding within the classroom setting. The student too must move from one who seeks to develop thinking patterns convergent with those of the teacher or those he feels are the pacesetters of his peer group to one who is not afraid to express divergent thinking. His role becomes more creative, less limited in response pattern, more original. He, too, must exhibit behavior that recognizes differences, and willingness to accept responsibility for suggesting new ways of proceeding.

Changes such as those suggested above may threaten both teachers and students. T-Group training in self-awareness, in

ability to listen to others, to see how others perceive you and how you rightly or wrongly have perceived others is one possible way to handle the threats posed by change. The classroom setting used in this experiment is 12th Grade social studies: Problems of Democracy. Hilda Taba points out that social studies are always involved with feelings and attitudes. Thus a class in Problems of Democracy must be concerned with notions of self, of uniqueness, of group membership and group process. The climate to be developed in such a class must include: a) the capacity to identify with people from different backgrounds within the community, avoiding or overcoming stereotypes that hinder real understanding of, and respect for others; b) the self-security that permits one to be comfortable in differing from others; c) the openmindedness that examines the opinions and ways of others with reasonable consideration and objectivity; d) the acceptance of changes that adjusts as a matter of course to new ways and events; e) the tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity without anxiety; and f) the responsiveness to democratic and human values.[1]

T-Group should allow for a greater degree of achievement of these objectives. The very essence of sensitivity training calls for the development of personal attributes and abilities to cope with elements in the environment that are inhibiting the teaching-learning process.

[1] Taba, Hilda and James L. Hills. Teacher Handbook for Contra Costa Social Studies Grades 1-6, San Francisco, California 1965.

What this short paper is suggesting, then, is that further research in the nature and process of change is mandatory if climates that will promote change in the most positive and profitable sense are to be established in the school setting. The work of Bellak on the language of the classroom has already indicated the degree to which the oral behavior of teacher to student or student to student may inhibit an individual's attempt to recognize, use and develop his potential, and his ability to learn. Other techniques must be investigated. If we mean to produce teachers who will be prepared to do more than perpetuate an educational system that has revealed its shortcomings, then federal, state, and local support must be given to encourage further research in this area.